DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 296 317 CS 211 317

AUTHOR Grusin, Elinor Kelley
TITLE A Study of the Working Relationship between Tennessee Law-Enforcement Reporters and Sources.
PUB DATE Jul 88
NOTE 37p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting for the Association of Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (71st, Portland, OR, July 2-5, 1988).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Communication Research; Credibility; Journalism; Mass Media Role; News Media; *Newspapers; *News Reporting; *Police; *Police Community Relationship; *Press Opinion
IDENTIFIERS Journalists; *News Reporters; *News Sources; Press Responsibility; Tennessee

ABSTRACT

The police-press relationship has often been viewed negatively by law enforcement officials, who complain about the media's current widespread use of young, inexperienced reporters on the police beat, which the officials believe indicates that editors have de-emphasized the importance of coverage of police activities. This practice was examined to determine whether there is a relationship between the length of time a reporter has been covering the police beat and his or her reported access. Full-time law enforcement reporters (N=23) at Tennessee's 11 largest daily newspapers, as well as their primary official sources (N=30) within the metropolitan police and sheriffs' departments to which they were assigned, were interviewed in person during March and April 1987. Results indicated that differences between reporters and law enforcement sources in age, experience, and years in the community may account for some of the friction that exists in the police-press relationship in Tennessee. A common complaint was that young reporters did not understand police procedures and were often newcomers to the community. (Fourteen tables of data and 33 notes are included.) (MS)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Elinor Kelley Grusin
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

ED296317

A Study of the Working Relationship Between Tennessee Law-Enforcement Reporters and Sources

by

Elinor Kelley Grusin
Assistant Professor
Department of Journalism
University of Mississippi
University, Mississippi 38677

Presented to the Newspaper Division at the 1988 convention of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (AEJMC), Portland, Oregon.

CS011317

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

A STUDY OF THE WORKING RELATIONSHIP

BETWEEN TENNESSEE LAW-ENFORCEMENT REPORTERS AND SOURCES

Two incidents pitted law enforcement against media in the courts and in the Tennessee legislature recently, turning what had been described as a "basically good relationship"[1] into one of open hostility in some areas of the state.

The first was a lawsuit filed by The Commercial Appeal, the Scripps Howard daily newspaper in Memphis, to obtain records of an internal investigation conducted by the Memphis Police Department and reviewed by the Federal Bureau of Investigation. The investigation was of a 1983 shootout in which a police officer and seven civilians were killed.[2]

When local and federal officials announced the investigation was closed and no further action would be taken, the newspaper's police reporter attempted to see the files. When his request was refused, the newspaper's representatives formally requested the files, citing the Tennessee Open Records Law. After a second refusal, attorneys for the newspaper petitioned Chancery Court in the first of a series of legal actions that lasted three years and ended with a favorable ruling from the Supreme Court of Tennessee. Thus more than three years after the hostage incident, the state's highest court granted the newspaper the right to publish findings of the police investigation.[3]

The second police-press confrontation grew out of the first. While Memphis police and newspaper representatives battled in court, members of the Tennessee Association of Chiefs

of Police lobbied the state legislature to restrict all investigative police records, active or closed. They asked that law-enforcement officials have final authority over what was released. Members of the Tennessee Press Association opposed the proposed bill, and it failed in the 1986 legislative session.[4]

However, police came back in 1987, this time joined by the governing board of the press association in a compromise bill that would have restricted some police records. This alliance drew fire from the state's large newspapers, most of which were not represented on the board, and this proposed bill also was killed in committee. However, before the proposed bill's death, both sides had inflicted wounds in the police-press relationship.[5]

This kind of conflict between police and press is believed by some to be a natural part of the adversarial relationship where the press serves as watchdog over government. Proponents of the adversarial stance warn of the dangers of forming too close a relationship with sources. Their reasoning is that reporters who become too close to their news sources may find it difficult, if not impossible, to write about corruption in the agencies.[6]

However, too much conflict can be harmful. Both accuracy and the amount of information shrink when reporters must go to less authoritative sources for news.[7]

When this happens, the public is the loser, according to Kelly, who found that both sides perpetuate the "myth" that the other is the enemy.[8] Typical of findings from studies of how police feel about reporters is one in which police chiefs in 25

cities with more than 100,000 population said their lower-ranking officers view media as "carping critics seeking out 'warts' that did not really exist."[9] Others cite a kind of "press brutality" in which media create incorrect and unfair images of police.[10]

Journalists, too, express frustrations with police because of difficulty in getting legitimate information they believe the public has a right to know.[11] Some also cite the unique "life and death" nature of police power and the potential for abuse as reason enough for close scrutiny of law enforcement activities.[12]

However, this ability to scrutinize law enforcement depends both on state access laws and the relationship between reporters and sources. Both Petrick and Cross pointed out the need for clear, statewide access laws so reporters would not find records available one day and forbidden the next.[13]

Cross emphasized the importance of a good relationship as a means of getting information. While advocating access laws, he believed forced disclosure should be saved as a last resort. Among his reasons was the belief that it was impossible for reporters to know when full disclosure had been made.[14]

Police journal writers also advocate a good police-press relationship, though for different reasons. Numerous articles stress the need to use media to get community support for law enforcement goals.[15]

Despite this apparent concern about the relationship by members of both professions, mass communication researchers have devoted little systematic attention to police and press interaction. Findings from studies of reporters and other types

of sources are applicable generally. Like other reporters and sources, police and press represent different social systems and have varying roles and needs. However, both have a common desire to communicate to mass audiences, which makes them mutually dependent.[16]

However, the police-press relationship may be unique because of the pressures and dangers in police work and the tendency for police to form a closely knit group both on and off duty. Also the often sensational nature of police news and the belief by police that the wrong handling of information can jeopardize their investigations make this reporter-source relationship potentially more stressful.

The few existing surveys on police and media have turned up negative feelings each have about the other plus the belief that neither knows very much about the other's job.[17] One major police complaint is media's current widespread use of young, inexperienced reporters on the police beat. This is a practice viewed negatively by law enforcement officials, who say this is one more indication that editors have de-emphasized the importance of coverage of police activities.[18]

This practice will be examined here to determine whether there is a relationship between the length of time a reporter has been covering the police beat and his/her reported access. The first hypothesis is as follows:

H1: More liberal access to police information will be positively associated with a reporter's experience and length of time on his or her present assignment.

The rationale here is that a journalist should be able to develop more knowledge of law-enforcement procedures and terminology over a longer period of time and should have more knowledge of existing records and know what to request. He or she also should be able to cultivate a variety of sources below the ranks of administrators and have more knowledge of what is going on within the agency. Reporters also should have developed a relationship of trust within the agency.

A major complaint of police administrators in the Skolnick and McCoy study was the amount of time spent briefing young, inexperienced reporters.[19] Additional evidence of a problem in the relationship came in a 1976 survey of police chiefs in the 100 largest United States cities in which only thirty-five percent said they had "friendly" relationships with the press.[20]

Other research indicates lower ranking officers hold even less favorable views of reporters.

Only about one-half of the Pennsylvania police chiefs in Singletary and Stull's survey estimated that sixty percent of their lower ranking officers had favorable views of media.[21]

Despite these findings, police are still eager to use the press to gain public approval and support for their agencies. Typical is a police journal article in which a Michigan police administrator called for a "concentrated public relations effort" through media.[22]

Since police need media to reach the public and reporters need police cooperation to get complete and accurate information about police activities and crimes, the opinion each has of the other's professionalism should be shaped by self interest. It

should depend on how cooperative each perceives the other to be.

Thus, hypothesis two is as follows:

H2:Both reporters and sources who give high ratings on cooperativeness to the other will also give high marks on professionalism.

Still a third area of discussion that bears on the police-press relationship is the content of law enforcement news. The crime news content of the press is one of the most criticized areas of coverage. The thesis of many critics is simply that journalists usually cover crime but not the criminal justice bureaucracy, ostensibly because they know little about it.[23]

A number of systematic studies have examined coverage in various media. So far, researchers have found that the public gets its perception of crime largely from media,[24] that the public has a distorted view of the reality of crimes from the numbers and types reported,[25] and that coverage varies from city to city.[26] Graber found murder, rape, and assault reported out of proportion to their real incidence.[27] Similar findings, plus a failure of reporters to write follow-up stories after the initial reporting of a crime, were revealed in a recent study of crime news in Louisiana newspapers. Researchers attributed this to several factors, including "strained" relationships between reporters and police.[28]

However, few researchers have compared news priorities of reporters and police. In one of the few, Fielder looked at citizen, police and media news priorities and found that police and citizens gave higher ratings to stories favorable to police while reporters rated unfavorable stories higher. However, all

three groups rated crime-related stories higher than service-oriented items.[29]

Based on these findings, plus the different goals of the two groups, it seems logical that police and reporters would have different news priorities. Also, since earlier studies of reporters and sources suggest that the amount of contact over time influences beliefs and behaviors,[30] one also would expect these differences to be related to the length of time a reporter has been assigned to an agency.

Thus, the third hypothesis for this study is as follows: H3:Police officials and reporters will differ on news priorities. These differences will be related to the length of time a reporter has covered that agency.

Methodology

Full-time law-enforcement reporters at Tennessee's eleven largest daily newspapers and their primary official sources within the metropolitan police and sheriffs' departments to which they were assigned were interviewed in person during March and April 1987.

Although Tennessee has twenty-eight daily newspapers, the Tennessee Press Association classifies only eleven as large dailies, those with 25,000 or more circulation.[31] Only large dailies were included because these were more likely to have staffs large enough to assign reporters on a regular and full-time basis to police and sheriffs' departments.

Combined circulation of all eleven daily newspapers is 840,000, representing 79.3 percent of all the daily circulation in the state. Geographic spread includes all three major areas of the state, western, middle and eastern Tennessee.

These newspapers range in size from The Commercial Appeal in Memphis with 227,540 in the westernmost part of the state to the Johnson City Press Chronicle in Johnson City with 29,032 circulation in the easternmost part.[32]

The other nine newspapers and their paid circulations are The Tennesseean at Nashville, 122,431; The Knoxville News-Sentinel, 93,545; the Nashville Banner, 70,490; The Knoxville Journal, 62,523; the Chattanooga News-Free Press, 62,063 ;Kingsport Times-News, 47,523; The Chattanooga Times, 46,333; Bristol Herald-Courier, 42,381; and The Jackson Sun, 37,004.[33]

Law-enforcement agencies included in the study are the police departments of Memphis, Nashville, Chattanooga, Knoxville, Jackson, Johnson City, Kingsport, Bristol and Elizabethton. Sheriffs' departments are those of Shelby, Madison, Davidson, Hamilton, Knox, Sullivan, Unicoi, and Carter counties.

Full-time police reporters covering these agencies were identified by letters to managing editors. Forms requesting names of reporters and their official sources were included. Letters to police chiefs and sheriffs were similar and asked for names of official spokespersons. Lists were compared and combined for a total purposive sample of 23 reporters and 30 law-enforcement officials. All targeted agencies and newspapers cooperated except the Washington County Sheriff's Department in Johnson City. Unicoi and Carter County sheriffs' departments

and Elizabethton Police Department were added to the survey because all are covered by full-time police reporters from the Johnson City newspaper.

Questionnaires for both groups contained some parallel items for comparison. Five categories of questions were demographics, access, professionalism (of both individuals and their organizations), and news priorities.

A professionalism rating was determined by having reporters rate sources on honesty, fairness, knowledge, and effectiveness. Honesty was defined as trustworthiness, whether the reporter believed his or her sources were truthful with information. Fairness was whether sources treated reporters equally. Knowledge was defined in the context of how much a source seemed to know about the journalist's job. As examples, the reporter was asked whether he or she believed a source understood why the reporter had to write stories that reflected both good and bad that occurred within law enforcement and why reporters sometimes had to ask "hard" questions.

Effectiveness was defined as how well the reporter thought a source performed his or her job, whether as a public information officer, administrator or investigator. In addition, journalists gave the agency an overall professionalism rating, which was defined as how well the agency performed its law enforcement role within the community as well as how well it policed its own members' standards of behavior on the job.

Terms defined for law enforcement were similar. Sources were asked to rate reporters on honesty, fairness, knowledge of law enforcement, and accuracy. Again, honesty was defined as trustworthiness, and law enforcement officers were asked if they

felt they could give a reporter information off the record for background without fear of seeing that information in the newspaper the next day.

Fairness was defined as whether the reporter made an effort to get both sides of a story and to present facts in an unbiased manner. The final two categories--knowledge of law enforcement and accuracy needed little clarification.

A combination of open-ended and structured items was used to obtain information about the relationship between Tennessee law-enforcement reporters and their official sources. Much of the open-ended data helped to interpret answers to structured questions.

The item on news priorities was the most troublesome for members of both groups to answer. Respondents were asked to rank ten types of law-enforcement news in order of importance from one to ten, with one being the most important and ten the least important. Each type was to have a separate number. Three journalists and six law-enforcement respondents could not make choices and gave several items the same numbers. These journalists (13 percent) and sources (20 percent) were removed from the analysis.

In order to compare rankings between the two groups, scores for each of the ten items were summed across each group and divided by the number of respondents to get an average ranking for each type of news. The Spearman Rank Order Correlation was computed to compare rankings of the two groups.

Limitations of the Study

Because both groups interviewed were purposive and not random samples, results were not interpreted to represent any larger population of police or journalists. Instead the results were used to describe factors that appeared to influence the relationship that existed at the time of the survey between members of these two groups in Tennessee.

RESULTS

One of the purposes of this study was to provide a description of reporters and law-enforcement sources in the survey. Demographic data provided interesting profiles of the two groups.(Table 1) Differences--and there were many--provided some insight into the conflicts in the police-press relationship

First, reporters tended to be much younger, much less experienced in their jobs, and less inclined to stay in the same community very long. About half the reporters surveyed were females, a relatively new phenomenon on the police beat.

In contrast, sources were older, more experienced in their jobs, and tended to stay with the same agency and in the same community over a long period of time. All sources, except one, were males. The lone female had become a public relations director for a large urban sheriff's department after the newspaper for which she worked folded.

A number of sources with longevity in their communities expressed irritation with reporters, whom they considered to be "newcomers" or "outsiders" with little or no knowledge of law enforcement and no ties to the region.

There were differences in education, also. While all journalists had about the same amount of formal education--generallly a bachelor's degree (usually in mass communication or journalism), law enforcement officials ranged from six with high school diplomas to six with advanced degrees beyond the bachelor's. The large middle group consisted of fourteen with some college and four with a bachelor's degree.

One of the most revealing findings was the tendency of law enforcement officials to get some extra type instruction in police-media relations. It was not clear whether the courses provided information beyond how to answer questions reporters ask and generally how to "handle" media so as to put the department in the best possible light. However, eighteen (sixty percent) of the sources had had a course in police-media relations either through a university, the FBI Academy, a law enforcement organization (usually the International Association of Chiefs of Police or the Urban County Sheriffs' Association) or through local police in-service training programs that hired media professionals as instructors.

In contrast, only two reporters had taken a course in criminal justice or police science to learn more about the work of the agencies they covered. Both were females who perceived the need for more technical knowledge. The others said they could learn all they needed to know while on the job.

Almost all the reporters covered more than one agency and often were assigned to cover courts, as well. Some also did general assignments reporting. Even in metropolitan areas where law enforcement agencies were large, where major crimes were numerous, and where the police bureaucracy was complex and had the largest budget in city or county government, these reporters had multiple duties. Only one reporter said he was responsible only for the metropolitan police department. He was a night police reporter for the Nashville Banner, and his was considered an "entry level" position.

Memphis provided a good example of the newspapers' tendency to combine beats. Here the day police reporter was responsible for the largest police department in the state plus Memphis city courts and Shelby County General Sessions Court. The reporter who covered the sheriff's department for this city's only daily, The Commercial Appeal, also covered eight divisions of criminal court, three divisions of civil court, and nine divisions of circuit court.

This tendency to cover so much with so few mandated that reporters do much less in-person checking, relying more on telephone calls several times daily to various offices or on growing numbers of police public relations persons. Also, fewer reporters went even to major crime scenes anymore. This, plus the tendency to place the youngest, least-experienced reporters on the beat caused some law-enforcement officers to conclude that editors did not regard the police beat as very important.

Data did not support the hypothesis that journalists with more experience and those who had been assigned to that law enforcement agency longer would report greater access to information. However, two other variables--age and length of time a reporter had lived in the community--were positively related to greater reported access.

Journalists rated their access to police information on a four-point scale from very restrictive to very unrestrictive. In cases where a journalist covered two agencies, the average was used. Those who rated access a three or above were the "high access" group; those below were the "low access" group. Journalists were also divided according to whether they had been on the present beat fewer than five years or five or more years. (Table 2) Cross-tabulations showed a greater proportion of those with more years on the beat reported greater access. However, when the Fisher Exact Probability Test was applied, the difference was not statistically significant ($p = .20823$) Findings related to total years journalistic experience were similar. (Table 3)

However, both age (Table 4) and years in the community related positively to greater access (Table 5). Reporters were grouped above and below the median age (27) and above and below the median number of years in the community (13.5).

Professionalism Ratings

Since the police-press relationship is one of mutual dependence, it was predicted that self-interest would influence how each perceived the other's professionalism. In other words, both reporters and sources who rated each other as highly cooperative would also rate each other as highly professional. However, this was supported only for the ratings sources gave reporters. Ninety-six percent of the sources who rated journalists highly in cooperativeness also rated them as more professional. (Table 6) However, reporters apparently were able to rate sources on professionalism, independent of how cooperative they were. (Table 7) Somewhat surprising was the overall high ratings both groups gave the other.

Data showing percentages for each response on all items--honesty, fairness, knowledge, accuracy (for reporters only) and effectiveness (for police only)--reveal sources gave journalists slightly higher ratings on all items than they received from reporters. (Tables 8-11)

Interviews with Journalists and Sources on Ratings

Results of interviews with journalists and sources contradicted some of the high marks when individuals were asked to explain their ratings.

The most common criticism journalists voiced was that sources frequently tried to hold back information. That criticism was given validity by several administrators who told the researcher they routinely circumvented the state's Open Records Law. An East Tennessee administrator described what he

said was a wide-spread practice of hiding information. It involved taking information that normally would be placed in an offense report (the initial report of an incident or complaint that is open under current state law) and writing it up as a "supplemental report." Since supplemental reports are considered the "work product" of a police investigation, they are not open. This meant that only the barest amount of information went into the record open to the press and public and all detailed information went into the closed record.

However, although almost all journalists perceived that information was being withheld routinely, none described the method outlined by the police administrator. Almost all journalists described instances where they were refused information and where police spokespersons were uncooperative. However, with a few exceptions, notably the Memphis case, reporters appeared to try to work within restrictions imposed. Forced disclosure was used only selectively.

While reporters were often frustrated in their attempts to get information, there was a positive side. Some praised police who they believed treated them fairly. They also praised law enforcement officers who were "policing" themselves and officials who could not be "bought."

Although law enforcement officers gave higher ratings than they received, they had some sharp criticisms of journalists and their newspapers. Officials, particularly in the larger metropolitan areas, were critical of reporters who they said spent less time at the agencies, made fewer in-person contacts, went to crime scenes less often, and treated the police beat as though it was temporary until they could "move up the ladder."

They also expressed frustration with the rapid turnover of reporters assigned to law enforcement and the time spent briefing newcomers.

All of the police criticisms were cited as justification for withholding information. The often-stated reason was that they did not know a reporter well enough to be sure he or she would not print information that might jeopardize an investigation. All police officials said there would be fewer police-press conflicts if reporters and editors understood the importance of withholding information known only to police and crime suspects.

However, while arguing for the restriction of information based on the need to protect an ongoing investigation, not one official could recall a specific case that had been damaged by the premature release of information. Almost all said they were "sure" this had happened. However, none could recall when. One Nashville investigator said he had been forced to "hurry and bring a case to a close prematurely because of the public outcry brought on by publicity."

News Priorities of Police and Press

Although the prediction was that journalists and police officials would differ significantly in their news priorities, data showed a high amount of agreement between the two groups. (Table 12)

However, some of the agreement disappeared when journalists were divided into groups according to the number of years they had been assigned to cover law enforcement. (Tables 13 and 14) Reporters with five or more years on the beat had less agreement with police (Spearman's rho = .5811, a = .05) than did those with fewer than five years (Spearman's rho = .9104, a = .01).

This high positive correlation on news priorities was unexpected. However, it may have been related in part to a misunderstanding by some law enforcement officials on the perspective from which they were to judge the importance of story types. Even though they were asked to rank story types according to their own opinions, some seemed to be judging them according to how their local media usually ran them. For example, some said they thought "stories that enhance police image" would help their credibility with the public. However, they gave this item low priority saying "Newspapers are not usually interested in anything like that."

Other factors also may have influenced their ratings. One was the presence of an in-person interviewer and the perceived need to appear knowledgeable about "what makes news."

Conclusions

Differences between reporters and law enforcement sources in age, experience, and years in the community may account for some of the friction that exists in the police-press relationship in Tennessee. A majority of the journalists were

in their early twenties and had relatively little journalistic experience and even less experience covering law enforcement.

While some younger reporters may be more competent than their older colleagues, the practice of putting the youngest and newest person on the beat was perceived negatively by police. A common complaint was that reporters did not understand police procedures. Another was that reporters did not know which records to request because they did not know what existed. Most administrators thought a course in criminal justice or other special training for law-enforcement reporters would be helpful. However, only two of the twenty-three reporters had taken a course. The others relied on their on-the-job training and what they learned from their predecessors on the beat.

Many administrators resented time spent briefing newcomers, who would soon be replaced by others just as new. They also saw this as an indication that newspaper management did not consider police activities as important as other types of news. In addition to being young, reporters were often newcomers to the community and viewed as "outsiders" who were "trying to make a name" for themselves, regardless of the effects of what they wrote. A Knoxville police official in charge of major crimes cited an example of a reporter who interviewed young children who had witnessed a murder and then ran the story with their photographs while the suspect was still at large.

While this type of reporting was the exception and not the rule, police tended to remember such incidents longer, and the memory strained an already tenuous relationship in which reporters had little time to spend cultivating sources. Fifteen of the twenty-three journalists covered both police and

sheriffs' departments in their areas, as well as other assignments, such as courts, city government, or general news.

Interestingly, while police reporters were younger and less experienced, police were becoming more knowledgeable in how to handle media. They were incorporating press-media relations courses into in-service training and hiring professionals as public relations directors to deal with media inquiries. This last trend had a plus side of saving reporters time and providing a readily available spokesperson. However, it was also placing more distance between reporters and rank-and-file police officers, who were directly involved with cases, as well as police decision-makers.

Another trend that put physical distance between reporters and sources was the newer type police facilities with security measures such as locked hallways between the public (including reporters) and police officials. As one Nashville assistant chief noted, when a police official did not want to see someone from the media, he simply was "not in" when the reporter stopped at a security checkpoint in the lobby.

All of these newer developments do not mean necessarily less information to the public. But they do mean information is controlled more carefully. In addition, with most police reporters already pressed for time because of multiple-assignment beats, they may be more willing to rely on controlled information and less inclined toward aggressive, independent monitoring.

All of these developments, plus the increased complexity of the law enforcement bureaucracies and their large share of the city and county budgets, need to be considered by newspaper

management in deciding priorities for local coverage of law-enforcement agencies.

Suggestions for Additional Research

Because the police-press relationship is one that has received little attention from mass communication researchers, this study is necessarily broad. It was constructed this way purposely to tap as many areas of the police-press relationship as possible. Because of its breadth, the depth in particular areas has suffered. For that reason, future research should concentrate on a more narrowly defined area of that relationship.

A still unanswered question is the effect of the use of public relations professionals as intermediaries as well as other developments that put distance between reporters and sources. Another is whether there is a difference in news priorities among reporters related to a variety of factors, including whether a reporter has had some specialized training or course in criminal justice procedures, amount of experience covering law enforcement, and the number of years lived in the community.

A third question is whether newspapers have shrunk the importance of law enforcement news. And do newspapers cover the criminal justice bureaucracy or just crime? All of these questions are suitable for future investigations of the press and police.

Table 1

Demographic Profile of Law Enforcement Reporters and Sources

Characteristics	Reporters	Sources
Median Age	27	47.5
Median Years in Profession	5.5	26
Median Years With Same Newspaper or Police Agency	3	18
*Median Years in Community	13.5	41
Number of Females	11	1
Number with Advanced Degrees beyond Bachelor's	0	6
Modal Educational Level	Bachelor's Degree	Some College
**Courses in Criminal Justice or Police Science (Reporters) Courses in Police/Media Relations (Sources)	2 (8.7%)	18 (60%)

*This figure is high because persons often went to work in communities of their birth.

**This information was sought to indicate whether members of either group made an effort to get any special training to learn about the other's job.

Table 2

Reported Access to Information by
Years Covering Agency Served

	Fewer than 5 years	5 or more years	
High Access	47% (8)	83% (5)	13
Low Access	53% (9)	17% (1)	10
	100% 17	100% 6	23

N = 23
p = .20823

Table 3

Reported Access to Information by
Total Journalistic Experience

	Fewer than 5 years	5 or more years	
High Access	40% (4)	69% (9)	13
Low Access	60% (6)	31% (4)	10
	100% 10	100% 13	23

N = 23
p = .16442

Table 4

Reported Access to Information by Journalists' Ages

	Below Median Age	Above Median Age	
High Access	36% (4)	83% (10)	14
Low Access	64% (7)	17% (2)	9
	100% 11	100% 12	23

N = 23
p = .02913
Median Age = 27

Table 5

Reported Access to Information by Years Lived in Community

	Below Median Years in Community	Above Median Years in Community	
High Access	30% (3)	77% (10)	13
Low Access	70% (7)	23% (3)	10
	100% 10	100% 13	23

N = 23
Median years in community = 13.5
p = .03318

Table 6

Cross-Tabulation of Sources' Ratings of Reporters' Professionalism With Reporters' Cooperativeness

Professionalism	Cooperativeness: Low	Cooperativeness: High	
High	40% (2)	96% (23)	25
Low	60% (3)	4% (1)	4
	5 (100%)	24 (100%)	29

N = 29
p = .01031

Table 7

Cross-Tabulation of Reporters' Ratings of Sources' Professionalism with Sources' Cooperativeness

Professionalism	Cooperativeness: Low	Cooperativeness: High	
High Access	67% (2)	75% (15)	17
Low Access	33% (1)	25% (5)	6
	3 (100%)	20 (100%)	23

N = 23
p = .38396

Table 8

Ratings of Sources' Honesty by Reporters
and Reporters' Honesty by Sources

REPORTERS RATE SOURCES ON HONESTY

Item: From your experience in working with your source(s), how would you rate him or her on honesty?

Response	Reporters (N = 23)
Very Honest	2 (8.7%)
Fairly Honest	15 (65.2%)
Not Very Honest	6 (26.1%)
Not At All Honest	0 (0.0%)

SOURCES RATE REPORTERS ON HONESTY

Item: Please rate the local daily newspaper reporter(s) covering your agency on his or her honesty in reporting on law enforcement.

Response	Sources (N = 30)
Very Honest	13 (43.3%)
Fairly Honest	13 (43.3%)
Not Very Honest	3 (10.0%)
Not At All Honest	1 (3.3%)

Table 9

Ratings of Sources' Fairness by Reporters and Reporters' Fairness by Sources

REPORTERS RATE SOURCES ON FAIRNESS

Item: From your experience in working with your source(s), how would you rate this person on fairness?

Response	Reporters (N = 23)
Very Fair	7 (30.4%)
Somewhat Fair	13 (56.5%)
Not Very Fair	3 (13.1%)
Not At All Fair	0 (0.0%)

SOURCES RATE REPORTERS ON FAIRNESS

Item: Please rate the local daily newspaper reporter(s) covering your agency on his or her fairness in reporting law-enforcement news.

Response	Sources (N = 30)
Very Fair	12 (41.4%)
Somewhat Fair	16 (55.2%)
Not Very Fair	1 (3.5%)
Not At All Fair	0 (0.0%)

Table 10

Ratings of Sources' Knowledge of Journalists' Role by Reporters and Reporters' Knowledge of Law Enforcement by Sources

REPORTERS RATE SOURCES ON KNOWLEDGE OF JOURNALISTS' ROLE

Item: From your experience, how would you rate your source(s) on his or her knowledge about the role of journalists in law-enforcement reporting?

Response	Reporters (N = 23)
Very Knowledgeable	0 (0.0%)
Fairly Knowledgeable	15 (65.2%)
Not Very Knowledgeable	8 (34.8%)
Not At All Knowledgeable	0 (0.0%)

SOURCES RATE REPORTERS ON KNOWLEDGE OF LAW ENFORCEMENT

Item: Please rate the local daily newspaper reporter(s) covering your agency on his or her knowledge of law enforcement.

Response	Sources (N = 30)
Very Knowledgeable	7 (23.3%)
Fairly Knowledgeable	17 (56.7%)
Not Very Knowledgeable	6 (20.0%)
Not At All Knowledgeable	0 (0.0%)

Table 11

Ratings of Sources' Job Effectiveness by Reporters and Reporters' Accuracy by Sources

REPORTERS RATE SOURCES ON JOB EFFECTIVENESS

Item: From your experiences, how would you rate your source(s) on his or her effectiveness as a law-enforcement officer?

Response	Reporters (N = 23)
Very Effective	4 (18.2%)
Fairly Effective	13 (59.1%)
Not Very Effective	5 (22.7%)
Not At All Effective	0 (0.0%)

SOURCES RATE REPORTERS ON ACCURACY IN REPORTING

Item: Please rate the local daily newspaper reporter(s) covering your agency on his or her accuracy in reporting on law enforcement.

Response	Sources (N = 30)
Very Accurate	14 (13.3%)
Fairly Accurate	22 (73.3%)
Not Very Accurate	4 (13.3%)
Not At All Accurate	0 (0.0%)

Table 12

Rankings of Story Types

Description:	Reporters (N = 20)	Sources (N = 24)
Violent Crimes	1.95 (1)	2.87 (1)
Narcotics Enforcement	4.30 (4)	3.75 (2)
Stories Exposing Police Wrong-doing	3.00 (2.5)	5.00 (5)
Traffic Accidents and Safety	6.30 (5)	6.29 (7)
Crime Prevention Techniques and Services for Citizens	6.70 (8)	4.20 (3)
Agency Administration (Budgets, Goals, Programs)	6.55 (6)	5.75 (6)
Misdemeanor Offenses	9.20 (10)	9.25 (10)
Juvenile Crime	6.65 (7)	6.75 (9)
Manhunts for Wanted Felons	3.30 (2.5)	4.79 (4)
Stories that Enhance Police Image (Policeman Shows Unusual Bravery)	7.30 (9)	6.33 (8)

* Correlation (Spearman's rho) reporters/sources = .9021
** Rankings for story types are in parentheses, α = .01

Table 13

Rankings of Story Types
Reporters < 5 Years/Sources

Description:	Reporters < 5 Years (N = 15)	Sources (N = 24)
Violent Crimes	2.06 (1)	2.87 (1)
Narcotics Enforcement	4.20 (4)	3.75 (2)
Stories Exposing Police Wrong-doing	3.20 (3)	5.00 (5)
Traffic Accidents and Safety	6.40 (5)	6.29 (7)
Crime Prevention Techniques and Services for Citizens	6.60 (7)	4.20 (3)
Agency Administration (Budgets, Goals, Programs)	6.93 (8)	5.75 (6)
Misdemeanor Offenses	9.26 (10)	9.25 (10)
Juvenile Crime	6.53 (6)	6.75 (9)
Manhunts for Wanted Felons	2.86 (2)	4.79 (4)
Stories that Enhance Police Image (Policeman Shows Unusual Bravery)	7.00 (9)	6.33 (8)

* Correlation (Spearman's rho) reporters < 5 years/sources = .9104, α = .01

** Rankings for story types are in parentheses

Table 14

Ranking of Story Types
Reporters ≥ 5 Years/Sources

Description:	Reporters ≥ 5 Years (N = 5)	Sources (N = 24)
Violent Crimes	1.60 (3)	2.87 (1)
Narcotics Enforcement	4.40 (6)	3.75 (2)
Stories Exposing Police Wrong-doing	2.40 (4)	5.00 (7)
Traffic Accidents and Safety	6.60 (8)	6.29 (5)
Crime Prevention Techniques and Services for Citizens	7.00 (9)	4.20 (3)
Agency Administration (Budgets, Goals, Programs)	5.40 (7)	5.75 (6)
Misdemeanor Offenses	9.00 (10)	9.25 (10)
Juvenile Crime	1.66 (2)	6.75 (9)
Manhunts for Wanted Felons	1.13 (1)	4.79 (4)
Stories that Enhance Police Image (Policeman Shows Unusual Bravery)	2.73 (5)	6.33 (8)

* Correlation (Spearman's rho) Reporters ≥ 5 Years/Sources = .5811, α = .05

** Rankings for story types are in parentheses

NOTES

[1]Interview with Don R. McNeil, Executive Director, Tennessee Press Association, Knoxville, Tennessee, December 11, 1986.

[2]"Police Records: An Open or Shut Case?" The Commercial Appeal, February 23, 1986, p. E1.

[3]Memphis Publishing Company v. Holt 710 S.W. 2d 513 (Tenn. 1986).

[4]"House Panel Shapes Police Records Bill," The Commercial Appeal, April 3, 1986, pp. B1, B3.

[5]Frank Gibson,"With Friends Like This...A Tale of Different Agendas in Tennessee," The Quill, March 1987, pp. 30-33. "Bill to Close Police Files Dies in Panel," The Commercial Appeal, April 1, 1987, pp. A1, A4.

[6]George S. Hage, Everette E. Dennis, et. al., New Strategies for Public Affairs Reporting (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1976), p. 150; see also Louis A. Radelet, The Police and the Community (Beverly Hills, California: Glencoe Press, 1973), p. 469.

[7]Patricia A. Kelly, "Northwestern Course Aims at Debunking Police-Press Myths," Journalism Educator, 41 (Summer 1986), p. 21.

[8]Ibid.

[9]Jerome H. Skolnick and Candace McCoy, "Police Accountability and the Media," 1984 American Bar Foundation Research Journal, 542 (Summer 1984).

[10]Edward M. Swietnicki, "Gaps in Crime Reporting Are Noted at Symposium," Editor and Publisher, June 1973, p. 28.

[11]Ibid., p. 14.

[12]Alfred Friendly and Ronald L.Goldfarb, Crime and Justice: The Impact of News on the Administration of Justice (New York: Twentieth Century Fund, 1976) pp. 42-43.

[13]Harold L. Cross, The People's Right to Know (Morningside Heights, New York: Columbia University Press), 1953, p. 5; see also Michael J. Petrick, "The Press, the Police Blotter and Public Policy," Journalism Quarterly 46 (Autumn 1969), p. 477.

[14]Cross, op. cit. p. 5.

[15]William A. Liquori, "The Media and the Police Executive," The Police Chief, March 1985, pp. 142-143; see also Joseph E. Scuro Jr., "Police-Media Relations," The Police Chief, January 1985, pp. 19-19.

[16]Walter Gieber and Walter Johnson, "The City Hall 'Beat': A Study of Reporter and Source Roles," Journalism Quarterly, 38 (Summer 1961), p. 289.

[17]Arthur Niederhoffer, Behind the Shield: The Police in Urban Society (New York: Anchor Books, 1969), p. 234; see also Herbert Altschull, "The Press and the Police: News Flow and Ideology," Journal of Police Science and Administration, 3 (1975), p. 425.

[18]William A. Hawthorne, "The Status and Direction of Police/Press Relations," The Police Chief, 44 (March 1977), pp.54-55.

[19]Skolnick and McCoy, op. cit., pp. 546-547.

[20]Hawthorne, op. cit., pp. 54-55.

[21]Michael W. Singletary and Gene Stull, "Evaluation of Media by Pennsylvania Police Chiefs," Journalism Quarterly, 53 (Winter 1980), p. 657.

[22]James B. Bolger, "Marketing Techniques and Media Relations," The Police Chief, 50 (December 1983), p. 36.

[23]Skolnick and McCoy, op. cit., pp. 554-555.

[24]John D. Meyer, Jr., "Newspaper Reporting of Crime and Justice: Analysis of An Assumed Difference," Journalism Quarterly, 52 (Winter 1975), pp. 731-734.

[25]George E. Antunnes and Patricia A. Hurley, "The Representation of Criminal Events in Houston's Two Daily Newspapers," Journalism Quarterly, 54 (Winter 1977), p. 760; see also Doris A. Graber, "Is Crime News Coverage Excessive?" Journal of Communication, 29 (Summer 1979), p. 91; Walter B. Joehning, David H. Weaver and Frederick Fico, "Reporting Crime and Fearing Crime in Three Communities," Journal of Communication, 31 (Winter 1981), pp. 88-96; and E. Terrence Jones, "The Press as Metropolitan Monitor," Public Opinion Quarterly, 40 (Summer 1976), p. 243.

[26]Shari Cohen, "A Comparison of Crime Coverage in Detroit and Atlanta Newspapers," Journalism Quarterly, 52 (Winter 1975), pp. 726-730.

[27]Graber, op. cit., p. 91.

[28]Jennifer Seifer, John Windhauser and L. Thomas Winfree Jr., "Newspaper Coverage of Crime and Justice: An Assessment of Louisiana Daily Newspapers in 1980 and 1985," unpublished paper presented to the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication, San Antonio, 1987.

[29]Virginia Dodge Fielder, Priorities for the Coverage of Law Enforcement News: Perceptions of Citizens, Police and Media Gatekeepers, unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Indiana University, 1976, pp. 184-189.

[30]Roy E. Carter, Jr., "Newspaper 'Gatekeepers' and the Sources of News," Public Opinion Quarterly, 22 (Summer 1985), p.136; see also Delmer D. Dunn, Public Officials and the Press (Reading, Massachusetts: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1969), p. 81.

[31]1986 Tennessee Newspapers Directory, annual publication of the Tennessee Press Service, Inc., for the Tennessee Press Association, Knoxville, Tennessee, pp. 27-37.

[32]Ibid.

[33]Ibid.